



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 28:1-20

Topic

Matthew ends his Gospel with Jesus giving His followers what has been called the Great Commission throughout the church age

Title

"The Commish"

Introduction

If you're stressed about Christmas shopping, I can help.

Today is December 14th, 2014. It's also December 1st, 2014. You see, we are using what is called the Gregorian calendar. But there is a Julian calendar, and on the Julian calendar, it's only December 1st.

I've just given you thirteen more shopping days.

There are lots of calendars, and today is different on all of them:

- Today is Safar 21, 1436, on the Islamic calendar.
- It is Azar 23, 1393, on the Persian calendar.
- It is Agrahayana 23, 1936, on the Indian subcontinent.

I wasn't able to calculate what day it is today on the Chinese, or the Hindu, or the Ethiopian calendars.

I can tell you that it is Kislev 22, 5775, on the Hebrew calendar.

The Hebrew calendar should be of interest to us because, unless we understand the dates, we will miss a lot of what was happening when Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Jesus rose from the dead on the 16th day of the month Nisan on the Hebrew calendar.

That date probably means nothing to most of us; but any Jew recognizes it as the Feast of First Fruits.

In fact, Jesus was crucified on Passover; He was in the tomb for the Sabbath following Passover, which was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; then He rose on First Fruits.

What is the significance of Jesus rising from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits? I'll organize my answer around two points: #1 Jesus First Fruits Guarantees You Will One Day Rise, and #2 Jesus First Fruits Guarantees You Can Everyday Serve.

#1 Jesus First Fruits Guarantees You Will One Day Rise

(v1-15)

Let me make something clear: I do not think that we, as Gentile believers, ought to celebrate the Jewish feasts. We are under no obligation, as the apostle Paul says in Colossians, regarding "food or... drink, or regarding a **festival** or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (2:16-17).

Having said that, it's just foolish to ignore the fact that Jesus fulfilled **all** of the Hebrew spring feasts, to the letter, on the very day they occurred, in His first coming.

How did He fulfill them?

- He fulfilled Passover by dying on the Cross just as the Passover lambs were being slain in the temple on Nisan 14. He was God's final sacrificial lamb, the lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.
- As His body lay in the tomb the next day, Jesus fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Celebrated on Nisan 15, it marks the beginning of a seven day period during which the eating of leavened bread is forbidden. Leaven is a symbol of sin (First Corinthians 5:6). Jesus fulfilled the feast in that His was the only sinless life ever lived, and His was the only sinless body ever to be entombed.

As for First Fruits, it was an offering of the very first of the harvest, brought to the Lord, representing confidence in the fuller harvest to come.

Jesus was the first Person to rise from the dead never to die again. His resurrection promised a greater harvest to come.

For one thing, He wasn't the only person raised from the dead in such a manner at His resurrection:

Mat 27:52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;

Mat 27:53 and coming out of the graves **after** His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

These saints, raised right **after** Jesus, were the First Fruits of the greater harvest to come. Their resurrection, on the Feast of First Fruits, guarantees that all believers in Jesus Christ will be resurrected.

There is another spring feast on the Jewish calendar - the Feast of Pentecost. Listen carefully to this quote from Zola Levitt:

The fourth feast, Pentecost, occurs 50 days after First Fruits, and on that very day, the Holy Spirit attended the Pentecost festivities at the Temple site "like a rushing, mighty wind." Pentecost represents the summer harvest, a larger harvest than First Fruits, but not so large as the fall crops, and the Holy Spirit harvested 3,000 people (Acts 2:41).

What happened on Nisan 16 has a direct bearing on **you** rising from the dead. You and I are among the ongoing greater harvest.

Mat 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

These gals had spent a restless Sabbath, waiting for the first moment they could go to the tomb.

We're told elsewhere they wanted to further anoint Jesus' body for burial, as the initial preparations had been too hasty. They fully expected Jesus to be in His tomb. It's been pointed out many times that the first unbelievers of the resurrection of Jesus were the believers.

Mat 28:2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.

Mat 28:3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.

Mat 28:4 And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

What's with the earthquake? It wasn't just the human race that was affected by Adam and Eve's sin. The whole creation groans, waiting to be redeemed. This earthquake prefigured that future day when there will be a new earth.

Angels are fierce. They are terrible - in the Old English use of that word. 185,000 Assyrian warriors were no match for one angel in the Old Testament, so it's no wonder a handful of Roman guards "shook for fear of him."

Jesus was already resurrected. The angel didn't roll away the stone so that Jesus could get out. It was so men could see in.

Mat 28:5 But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

Mat 28:6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Mat 28:7 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."

- I wonder if he thought there would be a large crowd at the tomb? You'd think that, with Jesus' promise that He'd rise on the third day, multitudes would be on hand.
- I wonder if the angel thought no one would be at the tomb? After all, why go to an empty tomb? Jesus had, before His death, told His disciples He would see them again in Galilee:

Mat 26:32 "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

Whatever he thought, angels are God's messengers, and this one faithfully delivered his.

I take every chance I get to comfort myself, and you, that God rewards faithfulness, *not* results. Do what God tells you; go where God sends you; speak what God gives you to say. Don't wonder about who, or how many, will be gathered, or affected.

Mat 28:8 So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

Mat 28:9 And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.

They went right away. They did not pass Go; they did not collect \$200.00.

They ran into Jesus. It suggests that I have the greatest chance of Jesus meeting me on the way if I'm being obedient to His direction.

Mat 28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

It's interesting that, even though Jesus said He'd see them in Galilee both before He died and after He rose; and the angel confirmed it; the disciples hung around Jerusalem, behind locked doors, for at least another week:

- It was on Sunday evening that the Lord appeared to the disciples, with Thomas being absent.
- Then, one week later, He appeared to them again, with Thomas in the group.

The Lord is so patient with us - especially in our fears. Even though He'd been clear in His directions, He condescended to meet them in Jerusalem, twice.

Are you waiting in fear about something the Lord has told you to do, e.g., telling someone you are a believer? Or taking a step of faith?

Jesus is patient... But He wants His perfect love to cast out your fear.

Did you notice that Jesus called the disciples His "brethren?" It's a word that, first off, would communicate His forgiveness.

John had been at the Cross, but the other nine had scattered, and Peter had three times denied Him. Still, they were His brethren.

If someone rose from the dead, never to die again, and did so on First Fruits... and many others rose with Him in glorious eternal bodies... Wouldn't you want to get on board, and live forever?

Not these guys:

Mat 28:11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.

Mat 28:12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,

Mat 28:13 saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.'

Mat 28:14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure."

Mat 28:15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

It must have been **a lot** of money; like, enough to retire on, with a new identity, in Spain. No Roman soldier worth his salt would want to admit to dereliction of duty on such a massive scale.

Later on, in the Book of Acts, Peter was in prison, being guarded by sixteen Roman soldiers. An angel helped him escape. Finding him missing, Herod ordered that all sixteen of the guards be executed.

If a person is not a believer in Jesus Christ, they have some "saying" as to why they do not believe He rose from the dead.

I used to think it was up to me, as a believer, to prove Jesus rose from the dead. It's a fact of history; so, really, it's up to the nonbeliever to explain the empty tomb - and all the explanations are insufficient.

Are you familiar with the expression, "Don't bother me with the facts; I've already made up my mind"? It was made famous by Foghorn Leghorn.

Anyone who denies the resurrection is about as insightful as Foghorn Leghorn.

Concerning your resurrection, the apostle Paul wrote,

1Cor 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

1Cor 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

He elaborated on this order in First Thessalonians:

1Thess 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

1Thess 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

1Thess 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Thess 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

We - the believers of the church age that began on the harvest Feast of Pentecost - will "all... be made alive." We will be resurrected and have glorious, eternal bodies.

Those who have died physically, and who will yet die, will be raised from the dead; those who are alive at the Lord's coming for the church will be raptured - changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

Israel had a very specific calendar, with its feast days. They also had a prophecy, from Daniel, of the exact calendar date that their Messiah would enter Jerusalem.

The Jews missed every one of those days, rejecting Jesus as the One Who fulfilled them in His first coming.

The result, as we have seen throughout Matthew's Gospel, is that there is a postponement in the establishing of the kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

We live during this postponement; and, since about chapter twelve or so, the Lord has been telling us how we ought to live, waiting for His return for us.

#2 Jesus the First Fruits Guarantees You Can Everyday Serve

(v16-20)

Certain passages of Scripture are so popular, or so beloved, or so essential, that we give them names: the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse and the Beatitudes come to mind. If I say "the Love chapter," you know it's First Corinthians thirteen.

The Gospel of Matthew ends with what we call the Great Commission.

Mat 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.

Jesus was a hiker. He spent a lot of time on mountains; and some of His greatest sayings were delivered from those heights.

Mat 28:17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

The doubt of the eleven was settled back in Jerusalem, in the two evening appearances I referenced - one without Thomas present, then the next with him there.

Scholars therefore suggest that when Jesus appeared on the mountain, there were more of His followers than the eleven.

The four Gospels record at least eleven resurrection appearances of Jesus to hundreds of individuals over a period of several weeks. One of those appearances is listed in First Corinthians 15:6, where we read,

First Corinthians 15:6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

It may be that the Great Commission was given, not just to the eleven, but to this greater group of "over five hundred."

Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

As the Creator of all things, Jesus always had "authority" in Heaven and on earth. Here He was letting them know that the mission He was sending them on would be empowered by Him.

Something you almost never want to hear is, "Hey, you're on your own!" They wouldn't be; and neither are we.

Mat 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mat 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

I think we absolutely must refer to another passage, or we'll miss the whole thing.

Jesus said, "Go," but before He ascended, He also said "**don't go until** the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, has come upon you."

Act 1:4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;

Act 1:5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

This baptism with the Holy Spirit is the way Jesus empowers His followers to fulfill the Great Commission.

When Jesus said, "Go," the verb should be translated, *as you are going*. It isn't a call to some foreign mission field; it is a description of you as a missionary in any field you find yourself.

It wouldn't be a stretch to paraphrase it, "wherever you go, and wherever you are... I am with you always, to empower you."

Here is what I'm getting at. Jesus was raised from the dead, and we will one day be raised from the dead. In the mean time, we are told, "[since] the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

The apostle Paul elsewhere said that he wanted to know Jesus, "and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10).

The Great Commission isn't something we must do. It's something that Jesus does, something that happens, as we are going through life, **because of who we are** - saved individuals who can live in the power of the resurrection, having God the Holy Spirit in us, and upon us.

Don't get me wrong; we are to "do" certain things. But we can only "do" them as unto the Lord if we understand our empowering. They should then simply happen as we are yielded to Jesus.

We are "to make disciples of all the nations." This is the only command in these verses - "make disciples."

How? By "baptizing," and by "teaching."

We understand baptism to be water baptism, and that it follows repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as an outward sign of the inward work of salvation.

"Baptizing," then, is the culmination of the sharing of Jesus Christ with others, commanding them to repent and be saved. It is the preaching of the Gospel - all the time, anywhere and everywhere we are "going." Those who respond with repentance and faith, we water baptize to signify salvation.

Jesus said to baptize "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." **It wasn't meant to be a formula** - although, for the sake of doctrinal clarity, it's a good idea to baptize folks using this description of God, Whom the Bible presents consistently as one God in three Persons.

If we were Jewish, we'd know that the Jews practiced baptism. There was process through which a non-Jew could become a Jewish proselyte, and that process involved three things: a sacrifice, circumcision, and then water baptism.

To a Jew, Jesus' reference to baptize would simply, but powerfully, mean that the person was a true convert.

The Jews did not baptize in anyone's name; they had no such formula.

Baptizing them "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," was an explanation that the Father - Jehovah - is God, and that the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God.

Not a formula; not the name of God; but an explanation of the Godhead.

Albert Barnes wrote,

The union of these three names in the form of baptism proves that the Son and Holy Spirit are equal with the Father. Nothing would be more absurd or blasphemous than to unite the name of a creature - a man or an angel - with the name of the ever-living God in this solemn rite. If Jesus was a mere man or an angel, as is held by many who deny His divinity, and if the Holy Spirit was a mere "attribute" of God, then it would have been the height of absurdity to use a form like this, or to direct the apostles to baptize people under them

Those who are saved we are to "[teach]... to observe all things that I have commanded you." To know exactly what Jesus intended by "teaching," I think we need to take the whole Book of Acts as our model; and the rest of the New Testament as our text.

Jesus did not merely say: "teach them all the things I have commanded you." Rather, He said, "Teach them to **observe** all the things I have commanded you."

"Teaching to observe" means to be the church - the called-out ones, meeting together in community, ministering one-to-another in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then out in the world sharing our faith in Jesus.

The actual teaching of the Word is fundamental and foundational to that process, and should always be a priority. It is job one.

But there's a whole lot more that goes into "teaching *to observe*."

Think about your driver's training. You can learn everything you need to know about driving a car from books. Until you get behind the wheel, with an instructor, you won't know how to drive.

"All things that I have commanded you" are whatever is found in the completed Word of God.

Jesus promised to "always" be with them - to be with us. It's a strong claim of His deity, because only God is everywhere present.

Jesus indicated there would be an end to this age. History is following a course set down in eternity past; and God, by His providence, keeps history on course.

Since we're talking feasts on the Hebrew calendar, I should mention that there are three fall feasts: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

If Jesus meticulously fulfilled all the spring feasts, *can we not assume He will fulfill the fall feasts?*

Of course He will... But how?

Leviticus 23:24 requires that, "in the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets."

Because we are told that the resurrection and rapture of the church is accompanied by a trumpet blast, many scholars have suggested over the years that the rapture might occur in September, on the Feast of Trumpets.

I'm not saying it will, or it must; and the Bible no where says it will, or it must. But this is why many suggest it will.

I do know that the rapture is presented as being imminent. It could happen any moment.

If it occurs, and it isn't the Feast of Trumpets, what gives? Well, something else will be the fulfillment of that feast.

The Day of Atonement would seem to find its fulfillment after the church has been removed from the earth, at the Second Coming of Jesus, at the end of the Great Tribulation, when all Israel will be saved.

The Feast of Tabernacles corresponds to the one thousand year reign of Jesus over the earth. He will again be tabernacling with men.

Mean time we simply "Go," and as we are going, the Lord wants to use us, everyday, to reveal to a sick, lost, and dying world, the power of His resurrection.

We are First Fruits; not just because we will one day be raised or raptured, but because we can walk in the power of the resurrection right now.

Want to "do" something? Start expecting Jesus to do what He's been doing since He rose from the dead; and to do it using you.